

Section Two

Describe the Notable Resource Qualities in the Area

The St. Johns River enjoys perhaps one of the most diverse and unique backgrounds of virtually any river in the United States.

Natural Resources The upper reaches of the river in Indian River and Brevard Counties contain over 280,000 acres of publicly-owned land. Many of the public lands protect the headwaters of the river and are part of the Upper St. Johns River Basin Project. The project has created a biological rejuvenation which is evidenced by the return of the Everglades Snail Kite and the endangered Wood Stork. In one month, bird counts recorded over 60,000 wading birds nesting and feeding in the region. Restoration efforts have enhanced fish populations. The Upper Basin Stick Marsh has for many years been one of the premier freshwater fishing areas in the nation.

The middle portions of the river include major tributaries such as the Wekiva River, the Econlockhatchee River, and major springs such as Blue Springs, Alexander Springs, and Salt Springs. The Wekiva and Econlockhatchee are designated outstanding Florida Waterways which means that the quality of their waters cannot be legally degraded. Around Lake George, the second largest lake in the state, and the adjacent Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, more than 308,000 acres of land have been placed into public ownership.



In the lower basin, saltwater enters the river at its mouth in Jacksonville. In periods of low water, tides may cause a reverse flow as far south as Lake Monroe, 161 miles upstream from the river's mouth. Some experts describe the river as three rivers in one. Because of this condition, unique marine species are often found within that stretch of the river. Shallow coastal waters near the mouth of the river serve as the only known calving grounds for the right-whale. The Lower Basin is of national importance, particularly to eastern and north-eastern states, as a lay-over and wintering area for migratory water fowl.

The entire stretch of the river is rich in fish, shellfish and wildlife. Some specific species include the endangered manatee found throughout the entire length of the St. Johns River in the summer. Examples of other species in need of special protection include the bald eagle, black bear, wood stork, shortnose and atlantic sturgeon, common snook, black creek crayfish and the limpkin.

The river is the region's most significant source for shrimp, menhaden, blue crab, and other commercially important estuarine dependent species. It supports a regionally significant sports fishery with important species such as largemouth bass, crappie and bream.

Historic: The first Floridians, pre-historic Native Americans, are believed to have lived along and near the river for thousands of years. Evidence uncovered by archaeologists show living sites near Sanford, Fla., with some of the earliest pottery ever discovered. The connection with the river is obvious with the discovery of a

canoe which some experts believe to be between 4,000-6,000 years old.

The northeast portion of the basin is home to some of Florida's most significant cultural and historic resources including some of the continent's earliest military installations such as St. Augustine's Fort Matanzas, Fort Caroline in Jacksonville and Fort Clinch in Fernandina Beach. Along the St. Johns River are many large prehistoric shell mounds including the famous Mt. Royal, as well as Hontoon Island.

Recorded history is among the earliest in the United States. Spanish seamen who discovered the St. Johns River in the early 1500s called it Rio de Corrientes, or River of Currents. Soon thereafter, in 1562 -- 50 years before the settlement at Jamestown, Va. -- the French established Fort Caroline on a high bluff three miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean, overlooking what they called Riviere de Mai, or River of May, because they arrived on May 1st. The collision of European interests over who would control the river escalated rapidly. Just three years later in 1565 Spanish soldiers marched north from St. Augustine and slaughtered the French. They renamed the river San Mateo to honor the saint whose feast followed the day after the battle. Later, the Spanish would change the name of the river to Rio de San Juan after a mission established at the mouth of the river. That name has remained evermore, even when the English acquired Florida in 1763, translating it to the St. Johns River.

After the Revolutionary War, of course, Florida and the St. Johns became part of the United States. What is now the major city along the river, Jacksonville, was established in 1832 under the name of Cow Ford, because at one point the river was shallow enough that settlers could have their cattle "ford" or cross the river.

Always a focal point of interest and control, the river would change hands twice during the Civil War. Ironically, a Union steamship, The Maple Leaf, was sunk by a confederate mine between St. Johns and Clay Counties in 1864. Loaded with supplies, it eventually settled beneath the river bottom, with the muck preserving the largest known cargo and artifacts still intact from the Civil War -- estimated at 400 tons. Through a cooperative effort of the Jacksonville Historic Society, the State of Florida, and East Carolina University -- a slow recovery and preservation process is underway. Incredibly, even legible letters and photographs of loved ones have been retrieved intact, revealing a unique insight into that era and the river's place in history.

With the restoration of normalcy after the Civil War, the St. Johns became a tourist attraction as steamboats brought tourists on excursions from Charleston and Savannah. In the early 1900's, Jacksonville, not Hollywood, became the first major location for motion picture production -- largely because of the river.

During World Wars I and II, shipbuilding in support of the U.S. Navy was a major industry along the St. Johns. The wide breadth of river in southern Jacksonville served as a major port for seaplanes during World War II. And the city donated more than 1,000 acres of riverfront land to the Navy, land that became and remains the second major military base along the St. Johns -- NAS Jacksonville.

Major international diplomatic initiatives were undertaken on the St. Johns. In 1976, President Gerald Ford and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat met at Epping Forest Yacht Club for a riverfront summit which helped pave the way for Sadat's dramatic trip to, and opening of relations with Israel three years later.

In essence, the St. Johns River has evolved from being the birthplace of Florida, to an area that in 1997 has 3.5 million people living in the counties along its historic banks.

Economic: The St. Johns River's economic impact on Florida runs into the billions of dollars. Two major U.S. Navy installations, Mayport Naval Station and NAS Jacksonville are located on the river -- representing the second largest concentration of the Navy in the Atlantic fleet. In addition, Blount Island on the St. Johns serves as a major military hardware prepositioning site for the U.S. Marine Corps. More material was shipped from this site than any other during the Gulf War.

Jacksonville's deep water port, with a 38 foot channel running 24 miles inland, represents one of the largest ports on the east coast. The port has an economic impact on the community of 1.38 billion dollars including more than 10,000 jobs. The port is the 15th largest container port in the United States and the 3rd largest importer/exporter of automobiles. It is one of the top intermodal ports in the nation, with access to three Interstate highways, three railroad lines and air cargo from Jacksonville International Airport and Cecil

Field.

Downtown Jacksonville itself is divided by the St. Johns, creating a dynamic downtown core on the north and south banks of the river. Major hotels and skyscrapers representing the city's leadership position as a banking and insurance center line the river. A major festival shopping center, The Jacksonville Landing, represents "ground zero" for downtown with access by boat, car and monorail system. Indeed, the river draws and keeps new business in this downtown core, helping to combat urban sprawl.

Commercial and sports fishing is a multimillion dollar industry from one end of the St. Johns to the other. Both fresh and saltwater fishing is possible because of the immense tidal ebb and flow from the Atlantic Ocean. Fish camps dot the river for its entire length.

The river itself provides a major thoroughfare of transportation by ship and barge, which can deliver raw materials from mining, agricultural and manufacturing interests for at least 200 miles of the river's length. Indeed, the St. Johns was Florida's first "highway."

Boat building and ship repair represents a longtime source of economic energy.

Lake Washington through which the St. Johns flows provides drinking water to citizens in Melbourne and portions of southern Brevard County.

Downtown revitalization projects in Palatka, Green Cove Springs, Orange Park, Sanford and Jacksonville all are based upon linkage and access to the river.

Cultural: The St. Johns is the focal point for what has become a cultural mecca. The Jacksonville Jazz Festival, the second largest jazz festival in the nation, is held each fall at Metro Park on the riverfront. Well over one hundred thousand residents and tourists attend, many in anchored boats soaking in the ambience. A renovated riverfront amphitheater is being planned for Jacksonville, providing an even better venue with a capacity of more than 17,000 people. The riverfront amphitheatre in downtown Palatka is another venue which takes advantage of its riverfront view. It is also the site of the annual Palatka Blue Crab Festival.



The Cummer Museum and Gallery in Jacksonville's Riverside, is the oldest such museum in Florida, with millions of dollars in art works and exhibits all in a riverfront setting. Another mile north on the river, the Jacksonville Museum of Science and History, which specifically targets children, draws more than one million visitors each year. Only a few blocks away, the Jacksonville Maritime Museum highlights North Florida's river heritage.

Kingsley Plantation, located on Ft. George Island near the mouth of the river and established in the 1700s, is a national historic site. Originally, it served as a port of entry for slaves from Africa. Now its museum serves as a tribute to the contribution African-Americans have made to our country.

North Florida is once again becoming a major factor in the television and motion picture industry. The St. Johns River is the key. More made-for-television movies were produced in the past year in Duval and Clay counties than any other location in Florida. Motion pictures from the contemporary age such as *G.I. Jane*

to old classics such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* were shot along the St. Johns.

The river provides a key base for education. Many colleges and universities are located on or near its banks with key educational programs aimed at studying the river and its resources.

Jacksonville University, the University of North Florida, St. Johns River Community College, and Sanford Naval Academy, all have programs, classes, and special studies focusing on the river.

Jacksonville's zoo, Jacksonville Zoological Gardens, is located on the banks of the river, and is planning a major expansion to take full advantage of its riverfront location.

Recreational: The St. Johns River helps provide North and Central Florida with opportunities to become a national sports mecca.

The National Football League's newest franchise, the Jacksonville Jaguars, play in its new home, Alltel Stadium, which sits across the street from the banks of the St. Johns River. Fans often take boats along the river to games, anchoring just south of the stadium at Metro Park. The river is featured regularly on Sunday network television broadcasts. The stadium is also home for one of the top five college football rivalries in the nation -- the Universities of Florida and Georgia, who meet annually at this neutral riverfront site, and have for 75 years. In addition, the Gator Bowl Football game, also played in the stadium with its river view, is now in its 52nd year.



The Annual Gate River Run in Jacksonville, a 15 kilometer race, serves as the national championship for that distance for the more than 8,000 runners who participate in it each year. It is also the largest field for that distance in the world. As the name implies, the race totally revolves around the river, crossing two downtown bridges along its route, including the 148 foot high Hart Bridge at the 8 mile point of the 9.3 mile distance. Runners may be too exhausted to fully take advantage of the view from the top, one of the truly incredible vistas along the river.

The St. Johns River Mug Race, is the one of the largest sailboat races in the world. The annual event attracts nearly 1,000 sailboats on a 70 mile course down the St. Johns from Palatka to Jacksonville.

Indeed boating of all kinds flourishes along the river creating one of the region's most viable industries and recreational opportunities. At any given time, sailboats, motorcraft, yachting, canoeing all are part of the St. Johns River scene. Even the smallest of "boats," windsurfers, are now a common site on the river.

Many hiking and jogging trails exist along the St. Johns' 310 mile shores. Nature trails exist for those interested in more "intellectual" recreation. In fact, the basin has over 682 miles of existing trails with over 182 proposed. In addition to the Florida National Scenic Trail and the proposed Central Florida Loop Trail, existing and proposed trails include canoe/kayak trails along the St. Johns and its tributaries.

Sports fishing may be the largest participatory sport of all recreational activities based on the St. Johns River. Whether netting for shrimp, digging for oysters, trapping crabs, or casting for large mouth bass, the St. Johns provides a perpetual 24-hour-a-day sporting opportunity. The St. Johns is also the home base for the Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament, the largest kingfish tournament in the nation with an annual economic impact of 11 million dollars.

Agricultural: The richness of topsoil along the banks of the St. Johns provides for fertile farming, especially along its Upper and Middle Basins.

More than 169,000 acres of citrus are grown in the St. Johns River basin. Cabbage, tomatoes, beans, celery,

onions and potatoes are among the major farming interests in the basin. Indeed, the town of Hastings in St. Johns County, Idaho notwithstanding, calls itself the “potato capitol” of the world.

A unique form of farming exists in Putnam County on 23,000 acres along the river. A majority of the nation’s ornamental ferns are grown here and distributed throughout the nation and world.

Forestry is perhaps the largest agricultural industry. Some 3.4 million acres of forests, predominantly pine, but also including hardwoods, grow along the river basin. That has led to the location of major paper manufacturing plants throughout the region, a major factor in the regional economy. Dairy and beef farms also are a major agricultural force with more than one million acres of pastureland to support these important agricultural interests.

Scenic: After all is said and done, the scenic view of the St. Johns rivals that of virtually any American river. From the jetties where the river meets the Atlantic Ocean to its majestic twists and turns through downtown Jacksonville, with 6 bridges and one of the most recognizable urban skylines, the St. Johns is perhaps the most photographed and painted vista in all of Florida. Indeed, for anyone who has seen the 165 foot high, 2.5 mile Dames Point Bridge over the St. Johns, they might consider it the Golden Gate Bridge of the East.

Farther south, as wide as many lakes, it takes on a similar beauty in rural form. Rare cypress trees growing along its banks, 100 year-old live oaks with Spanish moss draping down, eagles returning to their nests with fresh fish for their young, all are part of the beautiful St. Johns. One only has to witness it and it will never be forgotten.